

# THE epicenter

Employee Newsletter of the VA Palo Alto Health Care System • Edition 1, 2008

## Stand-Down a Huge Success



Nearly 200 homeless Vets attended the first VA Palo Alto sponsored South Bay Stand Down in Boulder Creek, CA. This event provided three days of safety and security services to homeless veterans such as food, shelter, clothing, health screenings, VA and Social Security benefits counseling, and referrals to a variety of other services, such as housing, employment, legal help, and substance abuse treatment.

Many Vietnam era veterans never received any counseling or training after their military service, which hindered their assimilation into civilian life. These Stand Downs help fill that gap by coordinating medical, legal and other assistance for those who served. Today, veterans returning from Iraq and Afghanistan go through a more rigorous screening, which helps their transition to civilian life.

Officials designed the retreat as a way to give homeless vets a chance to rest without worrying about housing, food or clothing. The veterans visited a dentist, a doctor and transitional housing organizations. They got haircuts and met with judges for sentencing on minor offenses.

So many things can be barriers for finding work or housing. For example, an old ticket kept one vet from obtaining a driver's license. On Saturday, a judge at the retreat ordered the vet to perform community service. By working at the camp, he paid his debt by 2 p.m., Sunday. Now it will be much easier to find a job with a valid driver's license.

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*Stand Down planning team pose under the Welcome Banner during preparation for Opening Day.*



*Veteran is prepped/pre-screened for visit with the Dentists.*

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# A Word From Our Director



**Elizabeth Joyce Freeman, Director  
VA Palo Alto Health Care System**

I hope everyone had a wonderful Holiday Season and I wish you a very Happy New Year. Fiscal Year 2007 was another incredibly successful year for our health care system in fulfilling our mission of providing world class health care for our veterans. I offer my thanks and recognition to each of you for playing a significant role in ensuring our many and diverse goals were met.

2007 was a year of “firsts” on many fronts. It was the year of our first unannounced

Joint Commission visit that resulted in our full accreditation for another three years. While many health care systems across the country were tested by the 2007 Joint Commission survey process both by the format and rigor, VAPAHCS facilities and staff shined in this survey. You all demonstrated to the survey team your commitment to continuous readiness and continuous process improvement. Several surveyors commented at the exit briefing what a privilege it was to have spent a week in our health care system.

We had our first CARF survey of both our inpatient Polytrauma Rehabilitation unit and our Polytrauma Transitional program. Again, the survey team was extraordinarily complimentary of the staff and the care provided. This survey occurred one week after the CARF survey for our Compensated Work Therapy (CWT) program. (Two CARF surveys a week apart was another first). The CWT program received no recommendations for improvement and numerous exemplary findings. This was not however the first time for our CWT program to shine in the CARF survey process! To round out our year of accreditations, VAPAHCS received accreditation from both AALAC and AAHRPP and all four VAPAHCS clinical laboratories achieved certification from the College of American Pathologists (CAP) in FY 2007. And lastly, the VA Committee on Rehabilitation (VACOR) visited VAPAHCS in September 2007 and was extremely complimentary of the VAPAHCS Polytrauma programs.

We had many “firsts” in terms of new visitors to VAPAHCS including Maria Shriver, First Lady of California; California Senator Diane Feinstein; VA Secretary James Nicholson; California Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger; the VA Advisory Committee on Women Veterans, led by General Irene Trowell-Harris; Assistant Commander of the Marine Corps, General Robert Magnus and his wife, Rose; Sergeant Major of the Army Kenneth Preston; Major General Michael Lehnert, Commanding General, Marine Corps Installations West; the Sergeant Major of the Marine Corps Installations West, Barbara Titus. Maria Shriver was actually a repeat visitor to VAPAHCS and we continue to have frequent interactions with her and her staff.

VAPAHCS held its first Homeless Stand Down September 7-9, 2007. More than 140 homeless veterans and 350 volunteers made this a life-changing event for the participants. Services provided included medical care, dental care, mental health care, assistance with legal matters including the on-site services of judges and judicial system officials, employment assistance and other services. The testimonials from the veterans who attended this event were truly inspiring.

Other “firsts” include VAPAHCS hosting an extremely successful jobs fair on February 13, 2007, during which approximately 500 prospective job applicants participated, our largest and most comprehensive jobs fair ever.

The “first” class of the VAPAHCS VERSANT program, a cutting-edge program designed to increase recruitment and retention of new nursing graduates, graduated 17 participants in the spring of 2007. The second class is now underway.

The last “first” I want to share with you is actually a repeat. For the second year in a row, VAPAHCS ranked the highest among the most complex facilities in VHA. This rating is based largely on our patient satisfaction, access to care and our quality scores.

Again, I want to extend my sincere thanks and appreciation to all of you. Our work – supporting America’s heroes – is critically important to the service members and veterans we serve and to our Nation. Be proud of what you do – and all you have achieved!

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Elizabeth J. Freeman".

Elizabeth Joyce Freeman  
Director

# Recreation Therapy Service and Veterans are “Ready to Ride” Thanks to Wounded Warrior Project

*Recreation Therapy Service*

On December 17, Wounded Warrior Project representatives presented two hand cycles to Polytrauma Transitional Rehabilitation Program (PTRP) for the Adaptive Bike Riding Program. Veterans, and injured active duty service members are “ready to ride” and look forward to participating in the approximately 220-mile Wounded Warrior Soldier Ride February 2008, from Palo Alto VA to Coronado, CA.

Recreation Therapy Service has worked with veterans participating in various adaptive recreational bicycle programs throughout the United States. This form of recreation therapy is one of many types of interventions that are an important part of the rehabilitation process incorporating behavioral components along with cognitive and physical skill development.

According to Richard Smith, VAPAHCS recreation therapist, “Recreation therapy promotes positive health and fitness and encourages veterans with various disabilities to continue participating in therapeutic leisure and community-based activities, post-injury and following discharge. Recreation therapy is a discipline, which like other therapies is an integral part of the continuing rehabilitation process,” Smith said.

“The general idea is to reintegrate the individual into activities that the veterans were involved in prior to their injury, and help them develop new leisure pursuits and passions post-injury,” said Smith. “The therapists recommend various recreation activities based on their individualized preferences, while considering the veteran’s injury, and consequently modify or adapt that activity based on the veteran’s abilities.”



*Wounded Warrior Project Representatives, Deputy Executive Director Steven Nardizzi and Western Area Director, Lonnie Moore met with Palo Alto VA Recreation Therapists Richard Smith and Kayla Forster, Lt Col David Rabb, Western Region Medical Command Seamless Transition Military Liaison and Senior Chief James Pitts, VAPAHCS Navy Liaison. Wounded Warrior Project donated two hand-cycles to the recreation therapy program for polytrauma patients.*

Recreation therapy includes a wide range of treatment modalities including mixed martial arts, arena football, fly fishing, scuba diving, video gaming, rock climbing, target shooting, wheelchair basketball, therapeutic drumming, adapted skiing and biking and creative writing/expressions. The therapy helps improve self confidence and builds skills that enhance the overall quality of life for the individual. In addition, participating in these programs increases esprit-de-corps and camaraderie within the group.



On Oct. 25, the Los Altos Jaycees hosted an event at Pinewood School to raise awareness for the Cystic Fibrosis Research Institute and the Golden State Road Warriors Wheelchair Basketball team ([www.goldenstateroadwarriors.com](http://www.goldenstateroadwarriors.com)). To promote the exhibition, Coach Paul Jackson visited VA Palo Alto Health Care System’s Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI) unit on Monday Oct. 22 and invited VA patients to attend.

The exhibition featured the Road Warriors playing teams from the Jaycees, the boy’s varsity and the girl’s varsity teams from Pinewood School. The action also included several of our TBI patients, greeted by a standing ovation by more than 200 attendees. It was a special evening for Chris (see photo) when he was awarded the game ball.



# VAPAHCS Celebrates Veterans Day



*Maddison Matthews, daughter of VA Palo Alto employees Travis Matthews and Patricia Teran-Matthews, proudly participates in the Pledge of Allegiance at the Vets Day Parade. Photo by Kerri Childress.*



*Above, WBRC veterans, staff and volunteers lead the way in Veterans Day Parade. Below, VAPAHCS employees Susan Feighery (Rec Therapy), Patricia Teran-Matthews (Public Affairs), and Gloria Rodick (LVN) cheering during Veterans Day Parade. Photos by Kerri Childress.*



*Employees enthusiastically pose for a group photo during the VAPAHCS annual Veterans Serving Veterans recognition celebration. Photo by Chuck Revell.*

Throughout the VAPAHCS and in the local cities veterans and employees gathered to celebrate Veterans Day in 2007. At all our divisions, recreation therapy service put on events for veterans with the help of local volunteers.

At the Palo Alto Division, VAPAHCS held its third "Veterans Serving Veterans," ceremony and packed the house. Our health care system employs more than 570 veterans who work tirelessly and with devotion to serve our veteran patients. The ceremony gives the health care system an opportunity to say thank you to them for their service, both in the military and at VA.

Leading off the ceremony was the VAPAHCS Honor Guard, made up of veteran employees Brian Higgins, Western Blind Rehabilitation Center; Ed Stallings, EMS; Romeo Horvath, Transition Patient Advocate, and John Sevilla, Human Resources. Air Force veteran Milton Johnson from Nuclear Medicine belted out the National Anthem.

Speakers included Chaplain and Gold Star Mother Sue Turley, Assistant Director and Army veteran Tony Fitzgerald, and Navy veteran Williams Meyers. Entertainment was provided by the VAPA Arts Band.

The Western Blind Rehabilitation Center, along with veterans and employees representing all the wars from WWII through Iraq participated in the oldest, continually running Veterans Day Parade in the country in San Jose (San Jose's claim, not mine!). Rain threatened throughout the day, but it turned out perfectly for the parade.



*Susan Feighery, USA, Desert Storm Vet and VA Palo Alto Recreation Therapist, Rene Estes, USN WWII Vet and VA Palo Alto Volunteer, and Dr. Virginia Trowell-Harris, Director of the Center for Women Veterans pose for a photograph at the Vets Day Parade. Photo by Kerri Childress.*

# WBRC Celebrates 40th Anniversary

On October 18, 2007, the Western Blind Rehabilitation Center (WBRC) celebrated its 40th anniversary. Events included a recognition ceremony with a variety of speakers including Lisa Freeman VAPAHCS Director, Eugene Apple the first WBRC Director, Tom Miller the Executive Director of the Blind Veterans Association (BVA), Dr. Greg Goodrich and Nancy McDonald. The presenters gave an inspiring overview and history of the WBRC.

That evening, the Palo Alto Elks sponsored a wonderful banquet and dance. The WBRC alumni and Blind Veterans of America worked in conjunction to sponsor the activities as part of an alumni reunion.

"The WBRC has a long history of innovation and contributions to the improvement of the blind rehabilitation profession and look forward to providing the best possible care for our service members who have lost vision," said Elizabeth Jessen, WBRC Director.

The WBRC was the second blind rehabilitation center established in the VA system, modeled after the program in Hines, Illinois. The WBRC opened its doors 1967 on the Menlo Park campus and later moved to its own building at Palo Alto in 1976.

During her opening remarks Lisa Freeman commented, "For more than four decades, the leadership, programs, and principles established within our Blind Rehabilitation have contributed significantly to raising the level of quality services for the blind in the United States and abroad. It has been through the VA's pioneering and sustained efforts in research, education, and training that many innovative advances have been realized."

"Many people do not understand the critical role that vision plays in walking, reading, face recognition, orientation, balance, and many other daily activities, all of which derive most of their sensory input from the visual system.

VA announced this year that it will make approximately \$40 million available during the next three years to enhance and extend our comprehensive nationwide rehabilitation," added Freeman.

The Director emphasized to the esteemed group of veterans, that the program alone does not accomplish life-style changes.

"Much of the credit goes to you for your determination to overcome perhaps one of life's greatest challenges – the loss of sight," said Freeman.

The Director thanked the remarkable WBRC staff and said, "I know that all the technology in the world does not replace a smile and encouragement from a friend."

Mark your calendars now for the WBRC 50th anniversary, scheduled for October 2017.



## MOVE! Program

The MOVE! program is a multi-disciplinary team effort in collaboration with the Telehealth Program, the Primary Care Medicine, Behavioral Medicine and the Bariatric Surgery Program. The MOVE! program at VAPAHCS started in May 2007 and to date it has enrolled more than 300 veterans.

Here's how one veteran appreciates the program:

To Sharon Moynihan, Sandy Farmer, and Cherri Helm and everyone connected with the MOVE! program. Since I've been on your diet and swim program, I now watch what I eat closer by marking down every thing I eat daily. I'm eating healthier with more fruit, vegetables, milk, and water, and I'm being more active by joining the swim center in Santa Cruz. By changing my eating habits and exercising more, my blood test really impressed Dr. Nick Sasson at the VA in Monterey.

Thank you for all involved in the program. You're all doing a great job for the Vets

— A Veteran

The MOVE! Program has been tailored to meet the individual needs of each veteran. MOVE! provides guidance on nutrition and physical activity and allows participants to set the pace through goal setting and a stepped level approach. Your MOVE! Healthcare team at VAPAHCS will provide lots of support and follow-up. So sign up now!

For more information, visit <http://www.MOVE!.va.gov>



*(Continued from page 1)*

# Boulder Creek Stand Down a Big Success



*Kate Severin, Outreach Coordinator, addresses the crowd during opening ceremonies.*

"The dental van was one of the most popular services provided at the retreat," said Katelin Campbell of VA Palo Alto. "That's largely because the government won't cover veterans' trips to the dentist unless the issues with their teeth stem from their time in uniform."

"Having medical services in a single place for the weekend allowed doctors to do comprehensive work with the homeless veterans. That is normally difficult because it's hard to schedule appointments for a transient population," said Ian Tong, medical director for veteran outreach in Palo Alto. "Getting them to specialists - dermatologists, dentists - all of this would normally take a year," he said. "What might take months and months to accomplish, we can do right here."

An estimated 200,000 veterans sleep on America's streets every night, said Kate Severin, outreach coordinator for the Veterans Affairs' Palo Alto Health Care System. "More are in shelters, transitional housing or temporarily staying in drug rehab programs. About 49,546 homeless veterans live in California."

A group of Vietnam veterans in San Diego organized the very first Stand Down in 1988. Since then, Stand Downs have reached out to more than 200,000 veterans and their family members. This year, nearly 100 Stand Downs were coordinated across the country.



*VAPA Arts featured band was "Legends In Their Own Minds." Bill Ulibarri from Consolidated Contracting Activity plays guitar while Kenny Chavez accompanies on flute.*



*Above, the Stand Down Medical Planning Team (Kyong Kang, Alice Espindola, Ian Tong, Miki Kwan) in front of the pharmacy storage vehicle.*



*Medical staff pose in front of the medical services tent.*



*VA barber sculps one of over 100 heads of hair cut throughout the weekend.*

# VAPAHCS Number 1 Again!

For the second year in a row, the VA Palo Alto Health Care System was ranked number one for complex facilities in VA. The report was prepared by the Office of Quality and Performance for the Office of Deputy Under Secretary for Health for Operations and Management. Facility level measures were averaged within the VHA for Quality, Access and Satisfaction. An overall weighted average is created for each facility. The weighted average is as follows: Domains Access=30%, Quality=50%, Satisfaction=20%. The Aggregate Scores provide an assessment of each facility's care within their caseload.

"Everyone should all be very proud of your contributions to this mark of excellence," says Lisa Freeman, VAPAHCS Director.

## VHA Complex Facility Scores in Order of Rank

Facility Name	Access	Clinical	Satisfaction	Aggregate
Palo Alto HCS	89.9	84.9	84.2	86.3
Cincinnati	89.3	84.9	78.8	85.0
Cleveland	93.6	80.5	77.4	83.8
VA Boston	87.6	80.9	84.8	83.7
Miami	89.9	82.4	76.8	83.6
Baltimore	91.0	81.7	77.0	83.5
Washington	90.6	83.0	72.4	83.2
San Diego HCS	87.6	79.5	84.5	82.9
Minneapolis	88.3	79.3	83.5	82.8
Hines	91.6	79.4	77.7	82.7
San Francisco	90.6	78.1	82.4	82.7
Durham	84.5	84.7	74.2	82.6
Ann Arbor HCS	86.0	79.4	84.1	82.3
New York Harbor	89.6	79.4	77.2	82.0
Salt Lake City	86.2	78.9	80.6	81.4
Seattle	78.9	83.4	79.4	81.2
Pittsburgh HCS	87.7	78.5	78.3	81.2
San Antonio	87.9	80.1	73.8	81.2
Decatur	85.2	82.2	72.5	81.2
Tampa	85.3	79.0	79.4	81.0
Gainesville	80.1	82.7	77.7	80.9
San Juan	88.0	80.3	71.2	80.8
Portland	82.7	78.1	81.4	80.1
Central AR.	90.4	76.3	74.2	80.1
Chicago HCS	83.9	80.3	72.1	79.8
Mid Tennessee	87.3	75.8	74.3	78.9
Memphis	86.6	77.7	68.7	78.6
Houston	84.1	76.5	70.2	77.5
Los Angeles	85.1	73.9	74.7	77.4
Dallas VAMC	84.7	72.8	64.1	74.6
<b>Average</b>	<b>87.1</b>	<b>79.8</b>	<b>76.9</b>	<b>81.4</b>

## Breast Cancer Awareness

To raise awareness about the correlation between fitness and cancer prevention, the Palo Alto and Livermore Divisions held a Breast Cancer Awareness Walk. Hosted by the Federal Women's Program, more than 90 staff, patients and volunteers participated.

The Women's Health Advisory Committee provided a booth, which offered information on breast cancer prevention, including screening and self-exams. Committee members were on-site to answer questions and hand out educational materials at Palo Alto.

Special thanks to VAPA Arts, who provided musical entertainment at Palo Alto. Employees interested in participating in future events should contact the Federal Women's Program at [V21PALFederalWomen'sProgSEPCommittee@va.gov](mailto:V21PALFederalWomen'sProgSEPCommittee@va.gov).



Chuck Revell







# CWT Program Achieves Three-Year CARF Accreditation

In July 2007, the Commission on Accreditation of Rehabilitation Facilities (CARF) awarded the Compensated Work Therapy (CWT) Program, under the VA Palo Alto Health Care System, a three-year accreditation for the Transitional Work Experience (TWE), Transitional Residence (TR), and Supported Employment (SE) Programs.

This is the third consecutive accreditation for the TWE and TR programs and the first for the new SE Program. The program achieved the highest level of accreditation and is awarded to organizations that show substantial fulfillment of the standards established by CARF. The CWT Program put itself through a rigorous peer review process and demonstrated that its programs and services are measurable, accountable and of the highest quality. Further, an organization accredited for three years clearly indicates that present conditions represent an established pattern of total operations that is likely to be maintained or improved in the foreseeable future.

In addition, the CWT Program is one of the few in the country that did not receive any recommendations for modifications. Nationwide less than 3% of programs attain this outstanding result.

"My congratulations to the CWT Program on their stellar CARF survey results," said Elizabeth J. Freeman, VAPAHCS Director.

The CWT Program is dedicated to helping participants improve the quality of their lives in at least five major areas: (a) Gaining a



sense of purpose through productive employment; (b) Development of positive work habits and attitudes; (c) Healthy living and mental health stability; (d) Maintaining independent living and improving social skills; and (e) Minimizing reliance on institutional care.

Commission on Accreditation of Rehabilitation Facilities is an independent, not-for-profit accrediting body promoting quality, value, and optimal outcomes of service through a consultative accreditation process that centers on enhancing the lives of the persons served.

## *Padma Patel Selected for Baylor's GHATP Program*

*Tom DeHaan (Volunteer)*



Chuck Renell

Padma Patel, Administrative Resident, recently received a full fellowship to The Graduate Health Administration Training Program (GHATP) at Baylor University. After acceptance, Padma says, "I relocated for the year to San Antonio, Texas to attend Baylor University. The program was very intense - I completed 70 units during the didactic phase, year one. Now during the residency phase, year two, I am rotating through various areas of the

hospital, and will work on a graduate management project (similar to thesis), take three long distance classes, and work on various projects. Although it may be hectic at times, I am enjoying this time learning and meeting so many wonderful people."

The GHATP Board started in 1992 and produced the most successful training program in the VHA, the GHATP Administrative Resident/ Fellow Program. This program creates a path of professional development for future executives who can successfully lead the VA in a challenging health care industry.

During a 12-month period, the resident/fellow will complete rotations throughout a major facility and become involved in all aspects of healthcare administration. Residents/fellows receive a salary, benefits, tuition, training, and travel. Experienced VA professionals known as preceptors provide training. At the conclusion of training, preceptors work with the resident/fellow to find a position within the VA health care system that best fits their skills, needs, and circumstances.

There are two types of training positions:

**Residents** – Graduate students who have completed the didactic portion of their accredited graduate program and who are required to pursue a practical experience for up to 12 months prior to receiving their degree.

**Fellows** – Graduates who recently received their master's degree from an accredited program and wish to receive advanced practical experience for up to 12 months.

Contact your local VA facility to learn about available GHATP residencies and fellowships. Candidates should apply six months in advance of the desired residency/fellowship.



# EMPLOYEE NEWS

## Employee Service Awards

### 10 Years

**Zenaida Carbonel**  
Nursing LTC

**James Chang**  
Surgical

**Janice Kishi Chow**  
Physical Medicine &  
Rehab.

**Andrew Duprey**  
Recreation

**Valerie Faulkner**  
Nursing LTC

**James Halloran**  
Chief of Staff

**Lisa Hull**  
Domiciliary Care

**Tina Lee**  
Psychiatry

**Caroline Ryan**  
Physical Medicine &  
Rehab.

**Lisa Sharp**  
Medical (Extended Care)

**Emelita Tipo**  
Nursing LTC

**Alda Vicencio**  
Nursing AC

### 15 Years

**Todd Anhalt**  
Dermatology

**Frank Brau**  
Surgical

**Adela Bretana**  
Nursing AC

**Mary English**  
Nursing MH

**Miriam Emanuel**  
Blind Rehab. Center

**Elizabeth Hardison**  
Chief of Staff

**Ray Hernandez**  
Research

**Loretta Johnston**  
Nutrition & Food

**Ken Robert Kehoe**  
Nursing Rehab.

**Whuida Lardizabal**  
Nursing LTC

**Richard Luckhurst**  
Nursing MH

**Molinda Martin**  
Surgical

**Ann Marie Mallari**  
Nursing M/S

**John McGuffey**  
Nursing M/S

**Daniel Nakamura**  
Blind Rehab. Center

**Kim-Lien Nguyen**  
Pharmacy

**Carmencita Santos**  
Nutrition & Food

**Lisa Solomon**  
Social Work

**Gasling Sweeney**  
Business Office

**Clifford Terrell**  
Psychiatry

**Chi-Shang Wang**  
Nursing MH

### 20 Years

**Alan Armstrong**  
Social Work

**Naida Austria**  
Nursing AC

**Ramsey Cheung**  
Medical

**Dolores Dahlen**  
Nursing LTC

**Nellie Fallorina**  
Nursing AC

**Dennis Gill**  
Engineering

**Leonora Javier**  
Nursing LTC

**Chiou-Big Lin**  
Nursing M/S

**Thelma Kalua-Seeto Mook**  
Radiology

**Jonathan Myers**  
Research

**Esperanza Sanchez**  
Nursing LTC

**Albert Steunenberg**  
Dental

**Van Turner**  
Engineering

**Lulu Wen**  
Nursing LTC

**Charles Williamson**  
Social Work

**Emilie White**  
Nursing Rehab

### 25 Years

**Salman Azhar**  
Research

**Linda Bober**  
Physical Medicine &  
Rehab.

**Jerome Cicero**  
A&MMS

**Christine Taylor**  
Nursing MH

**Ki Ok Yi**  
Business Office

### 30 Years

**Amelia Kastner**  
Nursing AC

**Stephen Katz**  
Psychology

**Larry Kemper**  
Police

**Josefina Ledezma**  
VISN Director Office

**Nancy Mauss-Clum**  
Chief of Staff

**Denice Southworth**  
Pathology & Lab.

**Fidal Tadas**  
Nursing M/S

**Daisy Wong**  
Nursing AC

### 35 Years

**Laura Benjamin**  
Ambulatory Care

**Vincent Hentz**  
Surgical

**Arlene Kasprisin**  
Audiology & Speech

**Francisco Ordillo**  
Fiscal

**Frank Phillippe**  
IRM

**Joe Rommel**  
Anesthesiology

**Boyd Wolfe**  
Engineering

**Philip Wong**  
IRM

### 40 Years

**Larry Wilson**  
Environmental Mgmt.

## Retirees

**A&MMS**  
Kaay, John (37)  
Tribuiano, John (36)

**Chief of Staff**  
Heinemann, Starr (18)

**Domiciliary**  
Horn, Donna (31)

**Engineering**  
Lee, Will (31)

**EMS**  
Jones, Lemanuel (17)  
Odum, Barbara (25)  
Taylor, George 37

**Fiscal**  
Narciso, Roland (43)

**IRMS**  
Wong, Phil (35)

**Medical**  
Cathirell, Mary (36)  
Mitchell, George (43)  
Traum, Arthur (11)

**Nursing**  
Batangan, Edem (19)  
Chung, Sylvia (20)  
Emodi, Sylva (26)  
Love, Linda (35)  
McConnel, Linda (20)  
Regacho, Milagros (26)  
Zehrung, Beverly (24)

**Nutrition & Food**  
Harmon, Michael (5)  
Kohorana, Amparo (30)

**Path & Lab**  
Foree, Francis (10)  
Forno, Lysia (48)  
Grajcer, Ruth (28)

**Police**  
Carter, Elliott (7)

**Radiology**  
Miller, Marsha (20)

**Recreation**  
Jergentz-Stout, Marjorie (7)  
Walker, Robert (18)

*Numbers in parentheses  
indicate years of service.*

# Wounded Soldier Naturalized at Livermore

On Tuesday, October 23, 2007, at the VA Palo Alto Health Care System, Livermore Division, USCIS Officers from the San Jose Field Office naturalized a Soldier who sustained serious injuries while on duty in Kuwait.

Mariela Mason, a Costa Rican native, adopted at the age of 15 months by a Swiss couple in the United States, wheeled herself before an audience of friends, family and VA employees and took the oath of citizenship.

At first, doctors did not expect Mason to live. She clung to life in a coma for seven months after a civilian in Kuwait intentionally rammed his vehicle into her and three other Soldiers, killing two, while they changed a tire on their truck beside a road in December 2004.

Expectations for her recovery were low, but Mason surprised her doctors and family; she is determined to regain as much independence as possible. Progress has been tough, but Mason has improved with daily physical, speech and occupational therapy. She has begun walking with a walker and the hands-on help of a physical therapist.

Mason is among many brave Iraq and Afghanistan veterans who received treatment for such severe brain injuries at the VA's Palo Alto Polytrauma Rehabilitation Center.



## Get Moving to a Healthier You!

*Patricia Teran-Matthews*

The next time you get ready to press that elevator button or get the keys out to drive your car, think about the “Champions Challenge,” and take the stairs, take a walk or take a roll instead.

In November, Veterans Canteen Service and HealthierUS Veterans initiated a “Champions Challenge” to Veterans and VHA staffs across the country to walk, run, or wheel “100 miles in 100 days.” The goal of this program is to get moving and get active! The ‘challenge’ is to increase physical activity while earning prizes along the way.

During these 100 days, local VA medical centers will also honor the 12 gold medal winners of the 2007 National Veterans Wheelchair Games.

New research from Stanford Medical School published in the November Journal of American Medical Association, reported that people using a pedometer walk about 2,000 steps - or 1 mile – more every day, than those who do not. Added benefits also included weight loss and blood pressure reduction. Researchers reviewed 26 studies involving 2,767 people who used the motivational tool.



*Chuck Revell*

Arthritis Today also recommends the “FIT formula” – Frequency (how often), Intensity (how fast) and Time (how long) – to help find answers on how to get started. When you walk or do any physical activity, start at a low level and increase slowly. Doing too much too fast can lead to injuries that set you back instead of move you forward. When you are ready to increase your activity, alter just one part of the FIT formula at a time.

According to our VAPAHCS Champions Challenge Coordinator, Shawna Hill, the Champions Challenge provides an opportunity for us to increase self-awareness of our daily activity level, and the benefits of participating in a regular fitness routine. It offers employees and veterans a time to socialize and network in a positive setting.

Hill added, “Such challenges initiate motivation and creates exploration of new approaches to enjoying fitness on any level (leisurely, moderate or vigorous)...engaging in just a ten-minute walk or physical activity can improve mood, clarity and focus in the work and home environment.

Recreation Therapy provides maps of the VA campuses designating specific routes and mileage for each division. “Walking maps” are located on the “Walking for Wellness” link of VAPAWEB under the “Health and Wellness” section. Additionally, employees and veterans are organizing group walks announced via email. Shawna recommends involvement by initiating one yourself, setting two levels of activity for walkers and rollers (wheelchairs) to participate in a brisk or leisurely stroll around the campus!

After consulting with your healthcare provider, get started, get that pedometer clicking and get movin’ towards a healthier you.

For more information, please contact Shawna Hill, CTRS Recreation Therapy Fitness & Wellness Clinics at x65004.



# Nuclear Medicine Sets the Stage

Patricia Teran-Matthews

When things start to get a bit hectic, we can always count on Radiology and Nuclear Medicine's annual costume contest to provide some comic relief and friendly competition. The event, which commemorated its fifth year, is the innovative idea of Dr. George Segall, Chief of Nuclear Medicine.



The participants included employees dressed up as everything from once country music stars, renaissance maidens, pirates, traditional international folk dress and others. However, the inflatable dancer, otherwise known as "Edwina Ballerina," won by unanimous vote, perhaps because of the tutu and pirouettes. After awarding the prizes, the lively crowd enjoyed their traditional potluck lunch and invited judges Kerri Childress, Patricia Teran-Matthews and Alberto Vilarreal.

The annual event provided a great opportunity to become more acquainted with Diagnostic Imaging Service. Diagnostic Imaging Service provides useful information to physicians in the diagnoses of certain diseases from heart disease, kidney function, bone diseases, etc. The service complements blood tests, other diagnostic tests, CAT scans, and X-Rays and is used for pre-operative, post-operative, and truly anytime, a patient communicates a concern to their primary care physician. Julie Loero, Supervisory Nuclear Medicare Technologist, summarized Nuclear Medicine by stating, "Basically, if it's an organ in your body, we can study its function."

Once again, congratulations to all participants. As your read this, Ronni Norte, Administrative Officer of Nuclear Medicine, is planning next year's event.

## From One Battlefield to Another...

# National Football League Retired Players Join VAPAHCS Marines to Celebrate Birthday

Five members from the National Football League Retired Players Association Northern California (NFLRPANC) joined with VAPAHCS employees and veteran patients to celebrate the Marine Corps Birthday on Nov. 10. Prior to the traditional cake cutting ceremony, they presented a check for \$15,000 to the Injured Marine Semper Fi Fund.

The NFLRPANC Chapter membership includes more than 200 former players from 33 of the 35 teams in the National Football League. As men who know what it takes to compete, win and lose, their members band together to contribute back to the communities in which they work, live and have played.

NFLRPANC members are proud to add wounded veterans to their list of charitable recipients, because their defense of our



*NFLRPANC members present donation to Don "Doc" Barker (Injured Marine Semper Fi Fund case volunteer and VAPAHCS volunteer), Staff Sergeant Brian Judkins (Injured Marine VAPAHCS Liaison), and HQ 23d Marine Corps Regiment at VA Palo Alto. Photo by Curt Campbell.*

Nation preserves the lifestyle and freedoms our children now enjoy. Although the sacrifices and injuries suffered by association members on their "battlefields," cannot compare to those beset on our nation's military men and women, the retired players feel a special connection to those who have fallen on the field of battle and are striving to heal their wounds and return to their homes and families.

This assistance is in the form of a grant with no expectation of repayment. Grants may help with immediate financial needs such as travel, childcare, lodging or problems resulting from lost family wages. Assistance is also given for long term needs such as modified homes and vans.

# Awards



Congratulations to VA Palo Alto Investigator Jonathan Myers PhD recipient of the “Michael L. Pollock Established Investigator Award,” conferred by the American Association of Cardiovascular and Pulmonary Rehabilitation (AACVPR). At each annual meeting, the award is presented to an individual whose ideas, committee work and leadership have benefited the AACVPR organization in a significant way and has earned national prominence in his or her field with contributions spanning many years. Dr. Myer’s selection recognizes his many outstanding contributions to cardiovascular and pulmonary rehabilitation. As the award recipient, Dr. Myers will deliver a lecture with the topic of his choice at the general session for all attendees.

CNBC, The New York Times, San Jose Mercury News, Fox Channel 2, Bloomberg Press, Oct. 10, all ran stories about VAPAHCS research covering, “A team of scientists who developed a test that was about 90 percent accurate in distinguishing the blood of people with Alzheimer’s from the blood of those without the disease.” Dr. Wyss-Coray, part of the Geriatric Research, Education and Clinical Center at the VAPAHCS, led the promising study.



The Academy of General Dentistry (AGD) recently awarded VA Palo Alto Health Care System’s Tim Verceles, DDS, with the Mastership Award, one of the most rigorous continuing dental education awards offered today. He recently received this prestigious honor during the AGD’s Annual Meeting and Exhibits held in San Diego, Ca. This award demonstrates long-term commitment to go above and beyond continuing education requirements to provide patients with the most current treatment options and superior patient care. In addition, Dr. Verceles was one of 12 dentists selected in the American Dental Association’s Diversity in Leadership Program.

It is a special pleasure to present our Chief of Pharmacy, Kelly Robertson the Patriotic Employer Award for supporting staff who serve with National Guard or Reserve. Raj Joshi, a commander in the US Navy Reserve, nominated Kelly. In his nomination, he wrote:

“I was employed in the VAPAHCS pharmacy for only a short time when I was deployed to Landstuhl Regional Medical Center, Germany. I learned that Kelly Robertson, my boss, was worried although she never showed it to me – I learned through a colleague. She supported me with full enthusiasm and assured me my job would be here when I returned. She managed without me, even though my job is very sensitive and hard to fill.”



Curt Campbell



Kelly Robertson



# Pharmacy Service Keeps Improving

*Tom DeHaan (Volunteer)*

Our Pharmacy Service continues to make significant contributions to promote the well-being of our patients. They provide 24/7 coverage with a staff of more than 100 pharmacists, residents, students, and technicians practicing in the inpatient and ambulatory care setting. Pharmacy Service provides more than 2,220,000 outpatient prescriptions/year and more than 3,500,000 inpatient dosages/year, plus 500,000 sterile IVs dosages.

Meeting the increasing needs of our veterans is important, but the number one criteria for service is patient safety. Pharmacy Services screens all inpatient medication orders for dosage, drug-drug interactions, allergies, drug-disease interactions, duplication, and appropriateness.

Most of our clinical pharmacy specialists are decentralized and located in ICU, medical and surgical wards, spinal cord injury, TBI, psychiatry, and at many clinics. This allows the pharmacy clinicians improved management of the patient's care to do therapeutic monitoring of patients on parenteral nutrition, warfarin, amino glycosides, and other high alert medications. They can perform tests to evaluate medication effectiveness, to recommend dosage changes, or prescribe new medications.

Additional gains in patient care came with the recent installation of our new Outpatient Robot, which handles the manual labor required for common tablet and capsule prescriptions. With pharmacists decentralized in various units, the physician and pharmacist can immediately review the dosage and use and within

an hour, the order is ready for pickup at Pharmacy Services. By utilizing automation and the technical support staff in the dispensing functions, our system allows pharmacists to provide the best of care.

Innovation and the need to optimize resources drive the development of other key programs within the service including:

- Pharmacoeconomic Program: ensuring cost-effective, evidence-based use of medications throughout the health care system
- Investigational Drug Program: provision of all medications used in human studies throughout the health care system
- Information Technology Program: management of VISTA drug files, automation interfaces and functionality
- Clinical and Education Program: provision of training for pharmacy staff, 7 pharmacy residents, and 16 pharmacy students
- Performance Improvement Program: ensuring Joint Commission medication management standard and Patient Safety Goals compliance

The Outpatient Pharmacy Sections in Palo Alto, Menlo Park, Livermore, San Jose and Monterey also provide comprehensive prescription services. Pharmacists provide collaborative medication management for patients in the General Medicine, Anticoagulation, Diabetes, and Home Based Primary Care Clinics. In 2007, pharmacy staff expanded into the Stockton Clinic.



*Curt Campbell*

# Protect Yourself with a Yearly Flu Shot



Chuck Revell

Flu season is upon us again. It begins in the autumn months, and continues through early spring. The good news is that the flu is highly preventable with a yearly flu vaccination.

## What is the Flu & how does it spread?

The flu is a contagious respiratory illness caused by the influenza virus, and can have serious and life-threatening complications. It is the sixth leading cause of death in adults.

## How does it spread & what are the symptoms?

The flu spreads from person to person when infected people cough or sneeze. Flu symptoms start suddenly and may last for two weeks. The flu can cause high fever, extreme tiredness, body aches, headaches, cough, and sore throat.

## How does the vaccine work?

The flu is not a bacteria, it is a virus, so antibiotics cannot treat it. Since the virus changes yearly, the vaccine is updated annually to include the current strain. The flu shot is made from inactivated virus, so you cannot get the flu from the vaccine. However, it takes about two to four weeks for your body to develop immunity. The vaccine can prevent illness by 70%-90% in most people. At the very least, it can lessen the symptoms of illness for those exposed to the flu.

## Who should be vaccinated?

1. Anyone over 50 years of age
2. People with chronic medical conditions (e.g. diabetes, heart or lung condition, weak immune system)
3. Residents of nursing homes or long-term care facilities
4. People who can transmit flu to others at high risk for complications
5. Pregnant women
6. Children aged 6 months to five years of age.

## How can you help prevent the Flu?

You can help prevent the flu by getting a yearly flu shot, and by practicing good health and hygiene habits. This includes, using a tissue when you cough or sneeze, and throwing the tissue in the

trash; frequently washing your hands with soap and water, or using a gel hand sanitizer; avoiding close contact with others when sick; and do not touch your mouth, nose, or eyes, because germs can enter into your system this way.

Protect yourself and others by getting your flu vaccine as soon as possible. Call the Telephone Care Program for information (650) 496-2579 or 1-800-455-0057. Daily walk-in clinics are available at each clinic facility.

## Daily Walk-in Clinics through March

VAPAHCS Site	Clinic Location	Walk-in Hours
Palo Alto	Bldg 100, Area A	8:30am – 4:00pm
Livermore	Bldg 62 3rd floor	8:30am – 4:00pm
Monterey	GMC Clinic area	1:00 – 4:00pm
San Jose	GMC Clinic area	1:00 – 4:00pm
Modesto	GMC Clinic area	2:00 – 4:00pm
Sonora	GMC Clinic area	2:00 – 4:00pm
Stockton	GMC Clinic area	2:00 – 4:00pm
Menlo Park	Bldg 321 Front Desk	8:30am – 12 Noon & 1:00 – 4:00pm

## The Darrel Vik Memorial Music Library

Mr. Duane and Sharon Thiel generously donated three music libraries. Each cabinet houses two CD players and a selection of music. Sharon Thiel was married to Darrel Vik an Army Veteran who passed away at the VA Hospital in Fargo. Sharon has since married another veteran, Duane Thiel. The family recalled that Darrel only heard the beeps and the chirps from life support equipment and thought they could camouflage these sounds by soft background music. Through his passing Sharon and her children decided they wanted to help others who were suffering the way Darrel had by playing relaxing music and soft tones which does not interfere with the staff's responsibilities or with medical equipment. The family has made a commitment to take a music library to one VA in every state across the nation. They have now completed 23 and plan to continue.



From Left to right Sue Scott, Voluntary Service Specialist, Mr. Duane and Sharon Thiel (donors) and Social Worker Geri Root-Mauthe.



# W.O.W. Carts (Workstation on Wheels)

By Patricia Teran-Matthews

A vendor faire was held at Martinez VA with six vendors showing off the upgraded Barcode Medication Administration (BCMA) carts. Palo Alto staff from Nursing, Engineering, Pharmacy and IRMS participated in evaluating the carts.

When the choice was narrowed to two carts, the team conducted a side-by-side comparison at Livermore and Palo Alto and ultimately selected the W.O.W. Carts.

Judy Schwab, BCMA Coordinator, requested that the vendor use patriotic colors because after all, "We are the VA," said Schwab. After consulting their design team Howard Medical offered the VA a new design with the American flag.

Initially the VISN used the BCMA carts mainly for scanning the meds into the patient record. BCMA is the application nurses use to scan the wristband and medication to indicate administration of medications.

Physician input the order into Computerized Patient Record System (CPRS), Pharmacy verifies the order, and that order goes into BCMA for nurses to administer.

This system is particularly helpful in other units now such as ICU. For example, doctors make rounds with pharmacists and during that time they can input the order in CPRS on the spot, which simplifies and expedites the process. In a minute or two the patient can receive their medications. With the previous system it could potentially take 30-45 minutes or longer to complete, verify and administer the order.

In addition to requesting patriotic colors, Schwab recommended that the vendor add the slogan "We Put Veterans First" to the carts, because after all, "We are the VA," she reiterated.



Chuck Revell



Kerri Campbell

**D**uring the national Public Affairs Conference, Kerri Childress, VAPAHCS Communications Officer, won three national awards, selected from more than 160 applications. Kerri won the "Excellence in Communications Award" for Print Media and Broadcast Media and the 2007 "Best of Show" for Media Relations. Last year, there were more than 190 positive stories about the VAPAHCS.

Physicians selected the red carts for use during rounds. The red color will allow staff to distinguish the carts that do not have scanners. The blue carts have two scanners installed. One is a fixed scanner for scanning medications and the other scanner is a wireless scanner for scanning the wristband on the patient at the bedside.

These carts will replace our aging Liberty carts and Freedom carts. They have the latest technology; which will allow staff to enter data into the patient's record at the point of care. Whether they are scanning the patient wristband to give medications, entering vital signs, completing an admission assessment or entering new orders during rounds...all of it is possible at the patient bedside. This saves the provider and nurse valuable time and allows our patients to be more involved in their care.

"These carts are very special to nursing and I have been stopped by Veterans all over the hospital saying how much they like them," said Schwab.

She further added that our Veterans really appreciate the effort made to put the slogan on the carts. "We put it on there, because we mean it," stated Schwab, "and because nursing staff does put the Veteran first."

# You Make a Difference!

*Submitted by staff, our veterans and their families*

I would like to express my appreciation for Dr. Reckord's superior, professional performance at the Modesto Out-patient Clinic. I always have a positive interaction during my visits.

He presents himself in a professional manner. He calls me personally with my lab results and explains them in a way I can understand. He's courteous and has a very good bedside manner. I firmly believe that his pleasant demeanor, civility and professionalism are inherent in him and are a reflection on how he really is.

I am very lucky to have him as my primary care provider and proud as well to be a VA employee who works with providers like him.

*— A veteran and employee*

Mary Lou Hicks is my medical provider at Livermore VA. I have been going to the Livermore VA since the 1970s. I have never met anyone who is more helpful or caring than Mary Lou, and I am sure that her other patients feel the same way that I do. I would recommend her for the nurse practitioner of the year award.

*— A veteran*

I would like to share briefly my experience with your low vision specialist, Jenny Smith.

I am a Clinical Psychologist and a WW2 veteran with macular degeneration. Jenny has been working with me for the past month. She has displayed rare gifts of sensitivity coupled with a high degree of professionalism and real compassion. I have benefited from her unusual desire to "go the extra mile" to be helpful to me. Jenny has made many valuable suggestions and has innovative ideas to make life easier for me at a troubling time as I lose my vision. You are to be commended for having the wisdom to have such a gifted person on your staff.

*— A veteran*

I just received a note from a veteran's widow expressing her appreciation to Dr. Kushner (Pulmonary Section) for the care he provided to her late husband. Her husband recently died as a result of pulmonary fibrosis. Dr. Kushner and colleagues (Drs. Hsu and Chung) provided exemplary care to the veteran and displayed heartfelt compassion to the veteran and his family. I salute Dr. Kushner's professionalism. I am so very pleased that he is a VA staff physician and a colleague of mine in the Pulmonary and Critical Care Medicine Section.

*— Rajinder K. Chitkara, Chief, Pulmonary and Critical Care*

You are to be commended in the quality of care we are receiving at the VA Palo Alto. I received care in the same day clinic and emergency room. I was treated with dignity and efficiency, which I found very refreshing.

I would like to say that Dr. Daniel R. Sedehi was exceptional in the way he treated me. He made eye contact, he shook my hand, he was informative and courteous in his care. When I left for the day, I felt that he had done everything possible to alleviate my fears and treat my whole person.

Dr. Sedehi, thank you for your fine service. Your attention to quality of care is a rare quality you possess. In a difficult time, you are a cut above.

*— A veteran*

**THE  
epicenter**

is published by and for  
employees of the VA Palo Alto  
Health Care System.

Submissions should be received by the 1st working day of the month to be included in upcoming issues. Due to space limitations, it is not possible to publish all submissions.

We welcome any comments, suggestions or story ideas you may have; please contact Kerri Childress (00K) at ext. 64888 or directly at 650-858-3925.

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